

## **THE AMERICAN VETERAN – EPISODE THREE, PART TWO**

JIM BENSON, HOST: THE DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS' AFFAIRS IS THE ONLY FEDERAL AGENCY TO PROVIDE SUBSTANTIAL HANDS-ON HELP TO THE HOMELESS.

JON LEIBERMAN TAKES A LOOK AT HOW TODAY'S VA IS REACHING OUT TO HELP GET OUR HOMELESS OFF THE STREETS.

VIDEO DEPICTS VARIOUS HOMELESS VETERANS.

TERRANCE WYMAN, VETERAN: WE ALL COME FROM DIFFERENT TIMES IN THE MILITARY BUT WE ALL SHARE THE SAME SITUATIONS AS FAR AS MAYBE ALCOHOLISM, DRUG USE, DEPRESSION, WHATEVER IT MAY BE, WE ALL SHARE THE SAME BOND.

JON LEIBERMAN: ESTIMATES SHOW THAT ON ANY GIVEN NIGHT MANY VETERANS, AS MANY AS 200,000, SHARE THE BOND OF HOMELESSNESS FOR MANY OF THOSE REASONS. DOUGLASS WASHINGTON WAS ONE OF THEM.

DOUGLASS WASHINGTON, VETERAN: WE ALL HAVE PROBLEMS YOU KNOW. WE'VE BECOME HOMELESS AND A LOT OF US HAVE SUBSTANCE ABUSE PROBLEMS AND THAT TIES US TOGETHER, BUT BEING VETERANS ALSO, WE ALSO HAVE THAT THAT TIES US TOGETHER AND IT MAKES US CLOSER AND THAT'S A GOOD THING.

LEIBERMAN: WASHINGTON FOUND HOPE ALONG WITH DOZENS OF HIS FELLOW VETERANS HERE AT THE CRESCENT HOUSE IN LOWELL, MASSACHUSETTS. ESTABLISHED IN 1995 IT'S ONE OF A NUMBER OF UNIQUE VA PROGRAMS THAT DOES MUCH MORE THAN SIMPLY GET HOMELESS VETS OFF THE STREETS.

RICHARD AMODIO, CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGIST: THIS ISN'T A PROGRAM REALLY ABOUT REDUCING SYMPTOMS. IT'S ABOUT A PROGRAM WHERE PEOPLE LEARN HOW TO DEAL WITH EVERYDAY CHALLENGES, LIKE DEALING WITH A SUPERVISOR AT WORK, GETTING UP ON TIME TO GO TO WORK, MAKING THEIR OWN MEALS, BUDGETING THEIR MONEY.

LEIBERMAN: THE CRESCENT HOUSE IS KNOWN AS A TRANSITIONAL HOUSING PROGRAM. FOUR OR FIVE VETERANS LIVE IN AN APARTMENT AND GO THROUGH THE ROUTINES OF EVERYDAY LIFE.

VETERAN: WHEN I WAS PLAYING PROFESSIONAL FOOTBALL, I HAD A PERSON DOING THAT FOR ME.

DOUG DEYOE, PROGRAM MANAGER, CRESCENT HOUSE: YOU'VE GOT TO GET UP EVERY MORNING AT 5:30AM TO CATCH A VAN OR TO CATCH YOUR RIDE DOWN TO A WORKSITE. WHEN YOU COME HOME AT NIGHT YOU HAVE TO COOK YOUR MEALS, YOU HAVE TO GET YOUR ROOM AND AREA CLEANED UP, MAYBE DO YOUR WASH. IN ADDITION TO THAT YOU HAVE MEETINGS.

VETERAN: THIS IS WHERE RESIDENTS SHARE EXPERIENCES THAT THEY'VE HAD OVER THE PAST WEEK, ANY OBSTACLES WHICH THEY'VE OVER COME.

VETERAN: THE RECOVERY GROUP IS ONE OF THE BIGGEST RESOURCES I'VE EVER SEEN IN MY LIFE.

VETERAN: SEVERAL OF THE STAFF HERE WHO REALLY DID COME TO MY AID WHEN I NEEDED IT.

LEIBERMAN: AT THE COMMUNITY MEETINGS, VETERANS RAVE ABOUT THEIR EXPERIENCES HERE. DOUGLASS WASHINGTON IS NOW A GRADUATE OF THE PROGRAM.

WASHINGTON: I'D PROBABLY BE DEAD, YOU KNOW, BUT THE REACH PROGRAM AND THE CRESCENT HOUSE, I CAN'T SAY THEY SAVED MY LIFE, BUT THEY GAVE ME A LIFE.

LEIBERMAN: THE VA IS ALSO OFFERING MEDICAL HELP TO HOMELESS VETERANS, 100,000 OF THEM IN 2003, AND RUNNING DOZENS OF OTHER SPECIALIZED HOMELESS SERVICES SERVING THOUSANDS MORE. THE DEGEORGE PROGRAM IN HOUSTON IS ANOTHER EXAMPLE.

CHRISTOPHER WHITEHEAD, VETERAN: IT'S A VERY, VERY NICE PLACE TO LIVE FOR ONE.

LEIBERMAN: THE DEGEORGE USED TO BE A HOTEL IN DOWNTOWN HOUSTON BUT THE VA, ALONG WITH OTHER GOVERNMENT AGENCIES, TURNED IT INTO A RESIDENCE FOR HOMELESS VETERANS, OR AS OFFICIALS THERE LIKE TO SAY, "FORMERLY" HOMELESS VETERANS.

LYNDA GREENE, COMMUNITY DIRECTOR, DEGEORGE HOUSE: WE MAKE IT HOME FOR THEM AND WE ALWAYS EMPHASIZE THE "FORMERLY" PART BECAUSE ONCE THEY ACTUALLY COME HERE TO STAY THEY'RE NO LONGER HOMELESS. THIS DOES BECOME THEIR HOME.

LEIBERMAN: THE DEGEORGE PROGRAM FOCUSES ON TEACHING THE VETERANS HOW TO GET A JOB. AND, THOUGH IT IS RUN BY A NUMBER OF AGENCIES THE VA HAS A MAJOR ROLE.

ED TUCKER, DIRECTOR, MICHAEL E. DEBAKEY VA MEDICAL CENTER: WE HAVE, AS THE VA, A CLINIC IN THE HOTEL WHERE OUR STAFF ARE THERE TO PROVIDE SUPPORT TO THE VETERANS REGARDLESS OF WHETHER IT'S VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION, TRANSPORTATION TO THE HOSPITAL, ENROLLMENT IN VARIOUS SUBSTANCE ABUSE PROGRAMS, VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION PROGRAMS OR OTHERS.

WHITEHEAD: I WOULDN'T BE WHERE I'M AT NOW HAD IT NOT BEEN FOR THE DEGEORGE AND THE PROGRAMS HERE.

BENSON: IF YOU KNOW OF SOMEONE WHO NEEDS ASSISTANCE IN THESE MATTERS, CONTACT VA ON THE INTERNET AT VA DOT GOV SLASH HOMELESS OR BY PHONE AT 1-800-827-1000.

JUNE 13<sup>TH</sup> BEGINS A SPECIAL WEEK FOR VIETNAM-ERA VETERANS. A "WELCOME HOME" CELEBRATION IN BRANSON, MISSOURI, AND ACROSS THE NATION WILL HONOR VIETNAM VETS 30 YEARS AFTER THE END OF THE WAR IN SOUTHEAST ASIA.

SKIP PALMER, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, OPERATION HOMECOMING USA: THE IDEA WAS CONCEIVED ABOUT TWO YEARS AGO BY TWO VETERANS, AND IT WAS REALLY TO LOOK BACK 30 YEARS AGO TO THOSE FOLKS WHO CAME BACK FROM VIETNAM AND WERE NOT WELCOMED BEYOND THEIR IMMEDIATE FAMILY AND IMMEDIATE COMMUNITY.

FRED ASHMAN, EXECUTIVE PRODUCER, OPERATION HOMECOMING USA: NOTHING HAS REALLY BEEN DONE TO FINALLY SAY, MEN AND WOMEN WHO SERVED, THANK YOU FOR YOUR SERVICE AND WELCOME HOME. IT'S AS SIMPLE AS THAT. BUT THERE IS A GREAT DEAL OF HEALING TO DO AND AS SOME OF THE FOLKS HAVE SAID, IT'S HEALING THE HOLE IN AMERICA'S HEART.

BENSON: THE WEEK-LONG CELEBRATION IN BRANSON, MISSOURI, FOR VETERANS, THEIR FAMILY AND FRIENDS WILL INCLUDE FISHING AND GOLF TOURNAMENTS, VINTAGE AIR CRAFT AND A WELCOME HOME PARADE, ALL CULMINATING WITH A SATURDAY FINALE.

ASHMAN: THE SATURDAY PROGRAM IS REALLY EXCITING. WE'VE GOT THE BEACH BOYS, THE DOOBIE BROTHER'S, THE FOUR TOPS AND A SPECIAL GUEST WHO I CAN'T SAY WHO THEY ARE YET.

BENSON: BRANSON MAY BE THE EPICENTER, BUT VETERANS WILL BE RECOGNIZED NATIONWIDE THAT WEEK AT MAJOR LEAGUE BALL PARKS AROUND THE COUNTRY.

PALMER: IT'S TIME TO SAY TO THOSE WHO WE LEFT BEHIND THAT WE'RE WITH YOU AND WE WANT TO WELCOME YOU HOME AS WELL.

ASHMAN: SEEK OUT A VIETNAM VETERAN THAT WEEK, SAY THANK YOU FOR YOUR SERVICE, WE'RE 30 YEARS LATE, BUT THANK YOU AND WELCOME HOME.

BENSON: FOR A WEEK-LONG CELEBRATION AND "THANK YOU" THAT YOU DON'T WANT TO MISS, REGISTER ONLINE AT OPERATIONHOMECOMINGUSA DOT COM OR CALL 1-888-265-VETS.

END OF TRANSCRIPT